Fall 2018

English 8110 – Proseminar
Kathryn Schwarz

The proseminar provides an introduction to graduate studies through attention to practical, structural, and theoretical issues. We will consider various accounts of the university as an institution, with emphases that range from its status as a corporate entity, to its disparate investments in futurity, to its history as a locus of dissent. We will look closely at specific aspects of professionalization, drawing on the experience of invited guests to discuss such processes as the development of research questions, methodologies, and archives; preparation for comprehensive examinations; steps that lead to a dissertation project; and the stages through which an essay moves toward publication. We will also expand our inquiries outward, to consider paradigms with implications not only for how we practice our academic work, but for how we inhabit the social world: ideology and cultural capital, discipline and precarity, community and consent. As we move through the semester, students will have opportunities to assign texts – fictional, historical, critical, and/or theoretical – that represent the periods, forms, and approaches with which they are most concerned.

English 8370: Studies in 18th Century British Literature: Satire, Romance, Novel 1600-1800
Jonathan Lamb

Three genres that find a lot in common during the two hundred years separating the publication of Cervantes’s Don Quixote from Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey are satire, romance and the novel. While these days it is usual to discover a mutual dependence between romance and the novel, and a growing division between the novel and satire, it was generally assumed in the eighteenth century that Cervantes had produced a satire of chivalric and pastoral romance that revealed the potential of realist fiction explored variously by Charlotte Lennox, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and Jane Austen, among others. I want to begin with a brief characterization the oldest of these three genres, satire, and then proceed to the other two, with the intention of suggesting an alliance between satire and romance that fueled the satiric novels of, for instance, Fielding, Lennox and Sterne. How it did this was not by any appeal to common standards of ethical behavior or the protocols of romantic love, but by inhabiting a disorder that was common to both genres, being passionate, highly imaginative, savage and sometimes crossing the border into madness. As Swift says, "Every bright idea is furnished with its reverse," a truth illustrated by Hogarth in the Bedlam scene of the last plate of The Rake's Progress, and by Swift in the amazing digression on "The Use and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth." What liberties does madness afford the author who exploits it? What dangers stand in the way?

English 8410 – Studies in Romantic and Victorian Literature: Law, Theatricality, and Romantic Literature
Mark Schoenfield

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!

Wordsworth, Prelude, Book IX

Accused of murder in Frankenstein, Justine is convicted because she cannot produce a persuasive narrative, cannot perform the self Elizabeth had declared for her. Flummoxed by Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennett laments that an entail—a legal device devised to direct inheritance -results in no knowing which way an estate will go, performing her "nerves" for familial, if not public, consumption. Francis Jeffrey, declaring the authority of his Edinburgh Review, grounds the journal on the legal authority or precedent and tradition, and on that authority, develops a legal practice grounding in his public court performance. Throughout the romantic period, issues of justice, property, and individual rights developed simultaneously with romantic aesthetics, theorizations of narrative persuasiveness, and proliferation of genres of the novel, poetry, and periodical prose. At the heart of this development is a problem of the self—at once a theatrical being and a legal fiction. We will explore authors such as Godwin, Wordsworth, Byron, Jane Austen, Mary Robinson, Walter Scott, P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley, John Galt, and James Hogg, and consider how these authors engaged legal issues in their writing and how the pervasive legal cultures they inhabited shaped their works.
English Graduate Courses offered 2018-2019

English 8440 – Studies in Comparative Literatures: Theories of the Vernacular
Akshya Saxena

In comparative literary studies, the vernacular usually refers to a language, to a literary style, and to knowledges. From its use by Dante in the early fourteenth century, the vernacular has been associated with notions of the mother tongue, with something native, local, non-dominant, and even, indigenous. And so, scholars in the humanities have recently looked favorably on the vernacular as the means to challenge the oftentimes homogenizing and imperializing frameworks of global, transnational, and national analyses. But despite their antihegemonic resonances, ideas of the vernacular have also played a formative role in colonially inspired projects of modernity and modernization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This course considers the hegemonic and anti-hegemonic histories, theories, and politics of the vernacular. We are interested in the radical democratic potential of the vernacular as well as in its coercive logics. Drawing on a few different literary traditions as well as on areas of study such as film, architecture, and art history, we will explore a variety of literary, visual, and political vernaculars. Readings will include selections both critical and literary: Dante Alighieri, Jacques Derrida, Miriam Hansen, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder, Zora Neale Hurston, Édouard Glissant, Benedict Anderson, Sheldon Pollock, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Vicente Rafael, Partha Chatterjee, and Mahasweta Devi among others.

English 8450 – Studies in Early and 19th Century American Literatures: Rituals of Belief and Practices of Law in the Americas
Colin Dayan

This course will be an attempt to make sense of the relation between legal practice and spiritual belief in the Americas. From its beginnings law traded on the lure of the spirit, banking on religion and the debate on matter and spirit, corporeal and incorporeal in order to transfer the power of the deity to the corrective of the state. Few of the topics under consideration are peculiarly English; indeed most of them (slavery, civil death, penance, and possession) form part of the general history of the Western world. But our primary readings will be strictly limited to the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century British West Indies and the United States. Through a close analysis of literary fictions and that peculiar genre called “gothic,” we will deal with the emergence, orchestration and function of law and the sacred as a kind of epistemological double whammy that redefined persons and property, spirits and things. The process by which words (such as race, blood, sacrifice, redemption, and judgment) are specified and by which their precise meaning over time is determined will be crucial to our investigations.

Primary readings: selected legal cases and sermons; the Bible (Leviticus, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Romans); Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland; Melville's Pierre and Piazza Tales; Poe's Poetry and Tales and Eureka; Emerson's Essays and Journals; Lydia Maria Child, A Romance of the Republic; Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, George Balcombe; Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin; Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life.


Spring 2019

English 8138 – Capitalism and Racialization
Alex Dubilet & Ben Tran

Capitalism and race are constructive elements of the modern world. The exact nature of their interrelation has been a topic of a rich and ongoing interdisciplinary theoretical debate across the humanities and social sciences. This graduate seminar will explore the interactions between capitalism and race from multiple theoretical angles and across various historical and geographic sites. We will consider the ways in which the structures of capitalism have produced and enforced forms of racial ascriptions and processes of racialization – and the different ways that scholars have understood these processes. By engaging with diverse scholarship across literary studies, critical theory, black studies, history, and settler colonial studies, this seminar will introduce students to
some of the most significant concepts of modern theoretical discourse, useful for research across different time periods, genres, and subdisciplines.

Topics to be covered during the semester include debates around Karl Marx’s theory of “primitive accumulation” and its racializing and gendering ramifications; Cedric Robinson’s articulation of racial capitalism and the black radical tradition; Michel Foucault’s theorization of biopower as a mode of dividing between those who are allowed to flourish and those who are marked for death; the debates on the relation between slavery and capitalism; the relation between racialization and surplus populations; as well as theories of coloniality and the decolonial imaginaries that seek to overturn it. In exploring these topics of ongoing interdisciplinary debate, the seminar will explore key theoretical perspectives, unpack their conceptual premises, and trace the requisite historical frameworks informing them. Throughout, we will ask after the different ways race has been theorized in relation to and in the ambit of liberal capitalist modernity.

**English 8331 – Medieval and Early-Modern British Literature: Subject to Sexuality in the Early Modern Period**

*Lynn Enterline*

This course will approach the intersection between literature, culture, and sexuality from two angles: we will read a variety of theoretical and critical texts investigating issues of sexuality and fantasy in general alongside literature from the ancient world through the renaissance that challenges normative assumptions about erotic life. As titles like *Queer Philology*, *Wanton Words*, *Homoeerotic Space*, and *Sexuality and Form* suggest (among others), scholarship in the early modern period has been an important testing ground for sexuality studies for many years now, engaging widely with questions raised by movement sin feminist theory, queer theory, gender studies, as well as psychoanalytic and historicist critique. We will read texts by Freud, Lacan, Laplanche, Kristeva, Althusser, Butler, Foucault, Béarn, Bataille, and perhaps a few others; and do so in conversation with the many literary critics and scholars who have adopted and adapted theoretical positions from such writing to propose new accounts of early modern poetry, drama, and classicism. With respect to literary history, the course begins with Ovid’s unruly, but wildly influential, *Metamorphoses* and follows several strands of medieval and early modern engagement with the “polymorphously perverse” figures that characterize his poem – and, indeed, anticipate a number of contemporary ways of thinking. We will read the most important ancient and early modern literary genres in which sexuality makes difference – epic, love, lyric, minor epic, drama – while assessing the intersections among sexuality, rhetorical and dramatic practice, and poetic theory in Ovid, Petrarch, Louise Labé, Thomas Wyatt, Marlowe, Shakespeare, John Lyly, John Webster, Milton and Marvell. From cross-dressing to cross-voicing, early modern engagement with Ovidian mythography unleashed compelling fictions that are still with us, and are still defamiliarizing conventional erotic schemes.


*Vera Kutzinski*

This seminar focuses on the poetic practices and theoretical propositions that have sprung from the diverse twentieth-century African American poets’ formal thematic engagement with both the limitations and the possibilities of (artistic) freedom – freedom in relation to memory, witnessing, historical ruptures, and (in)voluntary movement (exile, travel, homecoming). What visions have such poets to offer of survival, belonging, and living-together in the face of racialized difference, persistent misrecognition, and anti-black violence? As the vast majority of critical-theoretical pronouncement about African American literature have been and contribute to be based on readings of narrative, it is well worth asking what poetry contributes to such formulations. What new of different questions does poetry raise? What “unspeakable” things to poets seek to put into or between words? What are the poetics and the politics – if indeed they are different – that come into view when we read this body of work?

A major initial question is, of course, which or whose body of work? To address questions of academic canon formation, we begin by comparing anthologies of African American poetry, from Robert Hayden’s *Kaleidoscope* (1867) and Stephen Henderson’s *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973), to Arnold Rampersad’s *Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry* (2006) and Aldon Nielsen and Lauri Ramey’s *What I Say: Innovative Poetry by Black Writers in America* (2015). On the first day of class, each of you will choose one anthology on which to report during the two following classes (I will provide copies of these anthologies for the presenters). We will take our conclusions and questions about canon formation as a springboard for reading collections of poetry by Amiri Baraka, Rita Dove, Robert Hayden, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, Nathaniel Mackey, Harriette Mullen, Ishmael Reed, Claudia Rankine, and Jay Wright. This course will be reading intensive and, among other things, explore how and why we might teach certain poems in undergraduate courses.
English 8442 – Media Studies
Helen Shin

As the predominant operational principle of our technological infrastructure, binary logic has been expanding its rhetorical reach to the cultural sphere in the digitally networked mediascape. Software or hardware, the actual or the virtual, American or alien, real (true) or fake… indeed, precision-driven algorithms of 1s and 0s and the ontological hierarchy they assign to the two nodes of such binary formulae appear to suggest that discreteness could be readily conflated with value-weighted differentials. The technological mechanisms that undergird and channel the digital chasm, however, demonstrate that liminality is not only a presence in and of itself but also a crucial mode of engagement that rests upon instantiations of transgressive mediality across disparate states of presence. This seminar will explore visions of alterity that reconfigure the ways in which we perceive, comprehend, and in turn build our reality by feeling out the discursive contours of media studies old and new, from the analog electronic to digital networks, wetware, nonhuman cognition, data aesthetics, and ASI (artificial superintelligence) politics. Starting with foundational readings in the field including Marshall McLuhan, Raymond Williams, Giles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard, seminar members will trace the genealogy of media theory through cybernetics and new media studies such as Norbert Wiener and Janet Murray, leading up to recent scholarship by Nick Bostrom, Mark Hansen, Wendy Chun, N. Katherine Hayles, Lev Manovich, Donna Haraway, and more. Critical reflections will be weaved into readings, viewings, and doings of diverse media forms including hypertext literature (fictions by Luis Jorge Borges and Patschwork Girl), film (Blade Runner 2049), novel (William Gibson's Agency), graphic narrative (We3), animation (Innocence: Ghost in the Shell II), videogame (The Stanley Parable), television (Black Mirror and/or Westworld), podcast (open to suggestion), social media platforms, and works by Ted Chiang, who will be visiting campus for an open discussion this spring. The seminar will have an interactive element, open to suggestions for texts and other materials of interest for designated days.